

### [The Arizona Republic](#)

by Art Thomason

Only moments after Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport executives announced approval of a \$5-plus million federal grant to finance badly needed improvements, the airport's governing board awarded contracts to build the projects.

Airport officials had waited two years for the Federal Aviation Administration's approval of funds to expand a runway apron on which an increasing number of large jets are parked. The apron was built in 2002.

The \$5,055,748 grant will also finance two phases of drainage improvements that have been an ongoing issue in Gateway's evolution after its predecessor, Williams Air Force Base, closed in 1993.

Lynn Kusy, the airport's executive director, said the constructing a 170,000-square-foot addition to the 250,000 square-foot Alpha Apron is critical to serving the airport's rising number of large jets.

We have occasions when large aircraft are on the airport like the Boeing 747-800's," he said. "It's difficult to find parking for aircraft of that size because most of the existing space it taken by Allegiant Air and aircraft used by the U.S. Marshal's Service, Immigration and Customs and airline training schools."

"Sometimes we have to resort to parking aircraft on taxiways and we would rather not do that because it limits our (operations) option," he said. "The expansion will be big enough and strong enough to handle the big freighters and 747's."

Announcement of the airport improvement grant elated U.S. Congressman Harry Mitchell, who is credited as being one of Gateway's staunchest allies.

"Gateway has a significant economic impact on our region, and this grant will provide another boost to the airport's growth," he said. "Gateway supports 4,075 local jobs and generates more than \$534 million in annual economic activity, with the potential to generate even more."

Mitchell, who represents Arizona's 5th Congressional District, credited the airport's success to "dedication and excellent planning and initiatives taken by the city of Mesa and the Gateway Airport members who are committed to further developing and growing the airport."

Mesa City Councilman Scott Somers, whose 6th District includes the airport, said the grant brings some relief to Gateway's infrastructure needs.

"The airport is experiencing growth pains," he said. "And the lack of infrastructure is restraining further growth."

The governing board awarded contracts to CSW Contractors to provide drainage improvements near the airport's south side at a cost of \$2,390,743.49.

Dibble Engineering will conduct inspection and construction administration on the project for a cost not to exceed \$256,524.23.

The board also awarded a \$1,962,743.97 contract to Southwest Concrete Paving Co., for the apron expansion.

Airport officials estimated that the project would be completed in February 2011.